

GOING ALCOHOL FREE

If Sunday morning is more or less synonymous with 'hangover' in your mind, a break from alcohol might be worth considering. Feb Fast, Dry July and Sober October are all campaigns promoting the benefits, and challenge, of abstaining from alcohol for a month-long period of time - providing participants insight into how alcohol may be affecting their day to day lives. The true objective of these drink-abstaining periods is provide your body time to recharge, replenish and reset itself from your current or ongoing drinking habits. Giving up alcohol, even just for a month, can host numerous health benefits. Read on for tips to support yourself going alcohol-free, the benefits of doing so and some mocktail recipes to ensure you don't feel like you are missing out."

BENEFITS OF GOING ALCOHOL FREE

SOBERING STATISTICS

Alcohol may assist falling asleep more quickly, however it reduces the amount of quality rapid eye movement (REM) sleep that you achieve. REM sleep is what the body needs in order to feel most refreshed and recharged the following day. By achieving a better night's sleep, you will have more energy during the day and find it easier to fall sleep at night.

NO HANGOVERS!

Along with improved sleep quality, waking up without a throbbing head and dry mouth (often associated with a large amount of alcohol consumption) is certainly something worth jumping out of bed for!

WEIGHT LOSS

Many people find loss of body weight occurs when they stop drinking. This can be attributed to the lack of excess calories consumed through their drink of choice, or the poor food choices that often accompany a night of drinking (or the following day).



CAFFEINE, STIMULANTS AND THE BODY

Excessive alcohol use can have detrimental effects on the human body, both physiologically and psychologically. Alcohol consumption can affect our minds and bodies acutely (short-term) and chronically (long-term).

Some acute affects of alcohol consumption include:

- lowered inhibitions / awareness
- interpersonal conflicts
- falls and accidents
- alcohol poisoning

Some chronic affects of alcohol consumption include:

- cardiovascular disease
- diabetes
- liver disease
- cognitive impairment
- being overweight and obese
- various cancers

SOBERING STATISTICS

- Alcohol is the most commonly used drug in Australia.
- 4 in 5 adults consumed alcohol within the previous year in 2019.
- 1 in 7 Australians have consumed 11 or more standard drinks in one occasion at least once in the previous 12 months.
- Alcohol is the sixth highest risk factor contributing to the burden of disease in Australia.

IMPROVED MOOD

As well as being a known depressant, alcohol also contributes significantly to a person's mood and emotions. Removing alcohol from the equation contributes to renewed energy, emotional stability and overall, improved vitality!



BRIGHTER SKIN

Abstaining from alcohol assists your skin to recover from the dehydrating effects of drinking; dehydration can cause your skin to develop an unhealthy colour or texture.

Additionally, your body is able to absorb more vitamin A, increasing cell turnover, which keeps skin looking healthy and wrinkle-free!

INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

Avoiding alcohol will reduce the 'foggy' feeling in your brain, enabling you to think more clearly and increase productivity. Feeling lighter and thinking brighter!

UTILISE YOUR WEEKENDS

As your days off, away from work at the end of a week, regardless of your plans for the weekend, it is great to start it by waking up feeling rested, bright and full of energy. You can achieve a lot over the two days of a weekend when you take alcohol out of the equation, so try to start with a restful Friday night and see how much you can get out of your weekend - even if it's just relaxing at home!

REDUCED RISK OF ILLNESS AND DISEASE

Alcohol consumption is linked to more than 60 diseases, including cancers, cardiovascular diseases and cognitive disorders. A study by the University College London found just one month without alcohol lowers blood pressure and improves cholesterol and insulin resistance. Overall this contributes to improved liver health and a reduced risk of developing diabetes.

SAVE MONEY

Regardless of your beverage of choice, alcohol is expensive (compounded further if you are drinking frequently and / or in excess through the week). Reducing or eliminating alcohol for a period of time is likely to significantly improve your bank balance! This will enable you to save more, put it towards something else like a massage or trip away, or even donate some money to one of the alcohol-obtaining campaigns such as Sober October or Dry July if you or someone you know is taking part. If you commonly catch up with friends on a Friday night or tend to unwind from your day with a glass or two in the evening, obtaining from drinking may be easier said than done. Consider:

> Re-thinking Your Social Activities

If you commonly socialise at the pub or local bar after work or over the weekend, putting yourself in these environments is likely to increase your likelihood or tendency to drink. This provides the opportunity to think of other ways to socialise with family and friends in order to remove drinking from the equation.

Options might include: planning a picnic in the park, watching a movie at the cinema, catching up for breakfast at a local cafe, or organizing a coastal stroll or bush walk.

> Be the Designated Driver

Your intentions to abstain might waver if you arrive at a social event where others are drinking and encouraging you to join in. If you are the designated driver, and have nominated this to others, then you will not be able to drink. Removing the temptation from the outset is a great way to have a night off from alcohol, enjoy socializing and have a reason as to why.

> Identify Other Ways to Relax

Most people tend to associate a glass of wine or a cold beer with relaxation (especially after a long day or week at work). Awareness around the amount and frequency of alcohol consumption in this regard is important, particularly if you find you are unable to forgo an evening without drinking. Try a substitute beverage (water or cup of tea), or another activity such as exercise, walking the dog, movie watching or another outlet to help you relax and wind down.

> Enjoy Non-alcoholic Beverages

Treat yourself to some tasty, organic juice, water or other refreshing and health-promoting non-alcoholic drinks. Choose your favourite glass, add some ice and sip away! At social events, instead of feeling out of place without a drink in your hand, try something simple and refreshing like a soda with lime – if the atmosphere of the party is fun on its own, you will not even miss the vodka! Non-alcoholic beer and wine can be great options too.

> Identify Your Drinking Triggers

Taking time to reflect on your normal drinking patterns and identifying which feelings, people, places and situations prompt you to drink can be an important activity – as there may be things that influence your drinking habits and behaviors without you even realising. Perhaps there are certain people that you consistently tend to drink with, or maybe you associate certain nights of the week with consuming alcohol. Whether you link drinking with celebration, social events, stress relief, commiseration or calming nerves, identifying your personal triggers can be a beneficial exercise.

> Focus on the Positives

Focus less on what you are giving up or missing out on and more on what you are gaining. This includes: hangover-free mornings, increased energy levels, mental clarity and productivity, clearer skin, reduced consumption of extra sugar and empty calories, improved sleep quality, lessened risk of consequential, adverse health outcomes, and saved money.



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